



VOLCANO



notes from the interior

NOTES FROM THE INTERIOR

An *Encounters Unknown* Project by Volcano Theatre

TASK #1 THE CHAIRS

"When the Emperor pays a visit, remember the absurd."

I asked the actors to look at [IONESCO'S THE CHAIRS](#). It is a syllabus text for many students.

I imagine that students are required to analyse passages with regard to lighting, direction, set and performance. I asked the actors to film themselves. To be inspired for just two minutes, perhaps less. The Chairs is a duet. It might as well be a monologue. We are alone in the room even when we are two. We must deal with ourselves - our struggles, dreams and fears.

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TASK #2 NORA AT A WINDOW

Task #2 takes us back to one of the founding authors of our good old character-based theatre – Henrik Ibsen. I was drawn to a handful of things:

1. [A PICTURE OF A WOMAN AT A WINDOW BY VILHELM HAMMERSHØJ](#), in so far as it seemed to express what we are currently doing – namely looking out... which made me feel like we should bring a little bit of what is out there in to our domestic setting...
2. [A DOLL'S HOUSE](#), and particularly the opening stage description from Ibsen, which is both beautifully written and obscene in its fetish-like detail. The passage also suggests the very conquest of the external world that the 'woman at the window' looks so nervously upon.
3. The early pages of Act One, and Nora and Helmer's relationship are also fascinating in bringing the outside in – with all the singing birds and squirrels that serve to imprison Nora.

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TASK #3 CONVIRALITY

"I suppose now we are all renewing our relationships with chairs and sofas and floors and beds. And upon these spaces within spaces we are sometimes reading, reacquainting ourselves with old books and acquainting ourselves with new ones..."

After Ibsen and Ionesco I found myself picking up the Baudrillard's *Cool Memories II*. With its Hockneyesque cover I boarded a plane to LA, Sao Paulo and then Manila. I arrived at each destination looked out of the window but did not disembark.

After Marxism, Baudrillard delights in the destruction of the real, in the proliferating virus of information and communication. Baudrillard responds in a way that only French philosophy can. The poetic ecstasy of his language can make understanding what he is saying quite difficult. But in spite of this, we can tell that we have lost something important and he is trying to tell us what it is..."

[COOL MEMORIES II - JEAN BAUDRILLARD](#)

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TASK #4 THE ECSTASY OF SPACE

This week we abandon the ecstasy of language (if not communication). Think about the way COVID-19 has given rise to a new choreography of space. Everywhere I see people negotiating public space within the new rules, yet with the older norms of what may be polite or acceptable, what they can get away with, still fleetingly present.

(So the task is to) Present this new movement (dance) of space, this improvisation of deliberation and fear. (I guess you have to) Do this within rather than without, (but then one can) Imagine that the interior is now a place where people practice even perform this new choreography and is also a space in which we have developed, internalised or shared new rules to make our lives more bearable.

No words.

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TASK #5 COMMITMENT

Are you feeling it?

This one is about the nature of Commitment.

In contrast to the previous emphasis on space, I want us this time to consider how this enforced lockdown invites us to think about what we are committed to and why, perhaps, we so often fail in our commitments. Is this really a time for/of renewal...?

No movement!

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TASK #6 FUTURE PERFORMANCES

I was thinking about what kind of show we might perform/execute when a degree of normality returns to our civic life – when and if people gather again in public spaces to watch whatever it is we do...

And I thought it might be valuable to hear your ideal opening or first scene, the craft of beginning or constructing tension or joy or pleasure in the observing public. Or should we return to tragedy, or to the microscopic detail of the life observed?

So I am asking you to present your ideal post-lockdown scene for you or others – what is it we would want to see in the future?

You could assume either that you are performing it, or that you are presenting it to be performed by an imaginary other.

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TASK #7 FACTS AND VALUES

In a slight shift, you might think, I was thinking of the Agatha Christie novel/film *4:50 from Paddington*, and particularly the moment when Elspeth sees a woman being strangled and killed on an adjacent train. It happens very fast – her vision is blurred, and she has just woken from a deep, hallucinogenic sleep. She reports what she has seen, and no one (apart from her friend Miss Marple) believes her – certainly not the police. She begins to doubt herself and says to her friend that only the other week she had, in an absent-minded fashion, put sugar on her kippers...

The killing, and view of it, is shocking and appears to happen suddenly out of nowhere, without cause and without anything solid as its foundation. It is an event, but we cannot trace it, account for it, or find how it came about – we begin to doubt we ever saw it or experienced it.

I was thinking that the lockdown has something of this quality about it. As the days slide on, one can almost forget why we are doing this... Is this an event in our lives, or are we like Elspeth on that train – dazed as we peer through the smoke and the dirty glass?

I don't want you to be either of the heroines of Christie's novel (unless you feel impelled), but rather to continue to think of a performance, but with the slippery sense of doubt that the above is trying to convey...

Is this the Event of our Lives – a change in the way reality appears to us or a shattering transformation of reality itself... or it is a passing, bad dream from which we will eventually awaken?

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TASK #8 LOOKING BACKWARDS

This week's task has its roots in the current vocabulary of science and 'facts' that we are enjoying. This language has been reminding me of the great utopian writers Saint-Simon, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier – they all fancied themselves as acute observers of human behaviour. Newton was their hero. More recently, this had me in mind of B.F. Skinner, a behavioural psychologist who wrote a well-known book, *Walden Two*, in 1948. Skinner seemed to think that there were few limits to our ability to mould and change human behaviour. The social engineering that was key to these changes was sometimes referred to as 'Not Licking Your Lollipop'- deferred gratification and positive reinforcement and all that had to begin with the very young and a whole society could be built, as Skinner proposed in his book.

Our society has not been keen on the deferring side for some time, but it does seem as if this might now be important and the origins of these ideas lie in science and utopia thinking more generally.

I don't think lab coats are what I intend.

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TASK #9 BUT HOW ARE YOU?

The actors, this time, were asked to confer before recording their responses.

Since there is a new significance to the 'everyday' in The Lockdown, I wondered if it was time just to begin with mundane questions like 'How have you managed?' or 'How are you'?

How you answer these questions need not be truthful. Your answers might be those of a fictitious character. They might be spontaneous or rehearsed. They might be an approach to truth or lies...

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TASK #10 AS I PLEASE

I really enjoyed last week's manic positivity and self-doubt. This week is something of a continuation.

I remembered this old poem and poet called Hugo Williams, who had a book (decades back) called *Self-Portrait with a Slide*. In it was a poem called [WHEN I GROW UP](#). It is doubtless meant as an amusing little number, but it made me think that, aside from the collective terror of COVID-19, we might occasionally stray into the future tense when it comes to us individually... What do we want to be like when we grow up? Surely we have grown up now...?

Williams imagines being bald, smelling of piss and having a bottle of burgundy underneath his bed. He also looks forward to falling over in the street, having a nervous tic, and molesting a small boy who annoys him...

What do you imagine? Confer a little if you can.

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TASK #11 PROMISES

There is no prompt this week! You are all sufficiently imaginative to invent your own two minutes of confession, pain, pleasure, murder, shame or just commonplace observation. You might think of it as a dialogue between you, if that helps and if you have time to catch up with one another.

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TASK #12 THE STATE AND THE PLACE

I keep thinking about two things. Firstly, what is the State? An entity of force and violence? A representation of the general will? Something mysterious that we endorse to ensure our safety? One part of the social contract? Can you tell us what you think the State is and what its purpose is? Is the State something to fear, or something that guarantees our freedom?

Secondly, or alternatively... can you paint a picture of a place that you would like to go or return to, after this is all over? This might be a place you have been to or would like to go. I guess it could be fictitious, but we need to sense the colours and contours of this place. We want to recognise it, and go there too. The place could be interior, or it could be an exterior destination.

You could do both - The State and The Place - or just one.

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[VIEW ALL TASK VIDEOS](#)

Tasks set by **PAUL DAVIES**, Artistic Director
Featuring **CHRISTOPHER ELSON**, **NEAL MCWILLIAMS**,
MAIRI PHILLIPS, **REBECCA SMITH WILLIAMS**
& **MANON WILKINSON**
With special guest appearances by **PEGGY**
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